

The Christian Purge From Mosul

The Islamist attacks on non-Muslims are a problem for Islam.

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Imagine if a fundamentalist Christian sect captured the French city of Lyon and began a systematic purge of Muslims. Their mosques were destroyed, their crescents defaced, the Koran burned and then all Muslims forced to flee or face execution. Such an event would be unthinkable today, and if it did occur Pope Francis and all other Christian leaders would denounce it and support efforts by governments to stop it.

Yet that is essentially what is happening in reverse now in Mosul, as the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham drives all signs of Christianity from the ancient city. Christians have lived in Mosul for nearly 2,000 years, but today they are reliving the Muslim religious wars of the Middle Ages.

They have been given a choice either to convert to Islam or flee. They were warned before a weekend deadline that if they remained and didn't convert, they would be killed. Thousands—often entire families—have had to leave the city with nothing more than their clothes as militants robbed them of money or jewelry. Crosses have been destroyed across the city.

That such violent bigotry in the name of religion can exist in the 21st century is hard for many in the Christian world to believe, but that is part of the West's problem. Jews know all too well that anti-Semitism can inspire murderous behavior. But Christians or post-Christian secularists who are content in their modern prosperity often prefer to turn their heads or blame all religions as equally intolerant.

Today's religious extremism is almost entirely Islamic. While ISIS's purge may be the most brutal, Islamists in Egypt have driven thousands of Coptic Christians from homes they've occupied for centuries. The same is true across the Muslim parts of Africa. This does not mean that all Muslims are extremists, but it does mean that all Muslims have an obligation to denounce and resist the extremists who murder or subjugate in the name of Allah. Too few imams living in the tolerant West will speak up against it.

As for the post-Christian West, most elites may now be nonbelievers. But a culture that fails to protect believers may eventually find that it lacks the self-belief to protect itself.